

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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The Struggle

How do you access the strength of the Lord in your daily life?

How do you reframe your enemy to be the cosmic powers of this present darkness instead of the person who is causing you to be upset?

What does it look like to do everything and stand firm in your identity as an heir of heaven while enduring worldly temptations?

Ephesians 6:10-13 – ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, having done everything, to stand firm.

I) Prepare For the Struggle...

We have learned that our enemy is unlike what we perceive in the usual struggles of daily life. He is wise and beautiful. So much so that he believes created splendor is greater than the creative being. He has been granted authority to manipulate our circumstances to try to cause us to imitate him. He applies his wisdom to disguise his attacks as our usual struggles and to make offers mortals cannot refuse. He attacks high and low at our moments of weakness. We would be helpless but for the grace of God, who wills our victory. He arms us with knowledge of our enemy and his plans, and with the same armor in which He sent His Son Jesus into the depths of His struggles. Let us prepare in the same way.

◆ **Receive strength:** We approach our usual struggles—those of which we are passively conscious—by accounting for what it will take to get through them. Strength to push through long days, restraint to put up with impossible people, force to get our way. It's no wonder Satan hides his traps in common forms. If we are not paying attention,

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we use engage our flesh to deal with him, the very part of our being over which he is master. Jesus modeled for us the need for assertive preparation and invites us to “be strong in the Lord (Eph 6:10),” by following His lead. Before Jesus was attacked, He was full of the Holy Spirit. This is how we access “the strength of his power (v10).” This power has nothing in common with our physical and emotional being.

♦**Use time wisely:** The first thing written about this power is that it is armor. Our enemy is the aggressor. We are not in control of the timing and conditions of the struggle. God is. He grants us the time and ability to “put on the whole armor of God (v11).” Beware! Do not give into the temptation to use this time to strengthen the body or emotions. They are useless—detrimental—in this struggle. Satan’s intent is to lure us into sin by temptations of the body and emotions. It is our spirit that needs to be strengthened so it masters the body to “stand against the wiles of the devil (v11).”

II) A Different Kind of Struggle...

Our sense of struggle develops in our feelings. Our unconscious being works for the feelings of peace and prosperity, and to avoid pain and discomfort. We perceive these to originate in the people and things around us. This leads us to determine that our struggle is with and against our friends, family, and neighbors. Yet we are frustrated time and again because our efforts go unrewarded. It seems there is something bigger moving all the world in ways we cannot change. It seems our enemy is a cosmic force. He is.

♦**Spiritual darkness:** All the world strives for peace and prosperity. The varied definitions of these and the scarcity of resources that supply them puts us at odds with one another. We project this competition as antagonism between each other and define groups of friends and enemies. God’s wisdom shows us that “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh (v12).” It is our flawed understanding of life’s purpose and the impossibility of its accomplishment. That is by design, not of God but of Satan. He is the leader of “the rulers...the authorities...the cosmic powers of this present darkness (v12).” He drew us from the light of God’s wisdom into the darkness of a misunderstanding that elevates creation to be our end.

♦**Friends and enemies:** All civilization is covered in this darkness. Each of its ways of life aim for what are thought to be the sources of peace and prosperity. None work for the good of all and each begin with a premise of who is worthy. We group around these ideas and those that serve ourselves best. Friends and enemies. The result is

the self-destruction of war, the necessary end of a population who worship Satan by pursuing scarce creation above all. War of all kinds, internal to a people through competing cultural and political factions, external in international conflict. This is the manifestation of our struggle “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (v12).” We should be engaging in an altogether different struggle.

III) The Struggle of Identity...

How we identify determines our friends and enemies. Our simplified language makes it easy to know who is with or against us. Sadly, the spiritual forces of evil have caused us to replace an identity of those committed to worshiping God with an idea of political and cultural conservatism. Those ideas may not be wrong, but the ease with which the labels allow us to define our enemies as those pursuing opposing ideas. Blood and flesh enemies. A distraction from the cosmic struggle for our soul. God is calling us back to the heart of worship.

♦**Know Truth:** Those identifying as worshipers of God, followers of Jesus, are told to “take up the whole armor of God (v13).” The description of this armor begins with “the belt of truth (v14).” Our enemy’s principal weapon is deception. Not the simple deception of incomplete or inaccurate facts, but existential deception. Deception about reality, purpose, and being. A worldview in which we were not created but spontaneously formed; everything that is we can sense with our bodies and observe with instruments; and our purpose is attain a durable peace and prosperity that will sustain our family for generations. This worldview explains our feelings and justifies the otherwise inconsistent actions they cause. We need the belt of truth if we want any hope “to withstand on that evil day (v13),” when Satan attempts to deceive us in this way while we are at our weakest.

♦**Subtitle:** The nature of the spiritual struggle is internal. We do not often sense the presence of Satan or his demonic army. Instead, we sense an inner voice that affirms our feelings to be right and true. We feel our anger is righteous, our pain demands attention, our anxiety means we should hide. God’s Truth often—usually?—conflicts with our feelings. He urges us to “stand firm” after “having done everything (v13).” We are to apprehend His Truth to fend off the deceptions of Satan that otherwise cause us to energize our feelings that, while real, give rise to false ideas. When we commit to knowing ourselves as beloved heirs to the kingdom of heaven, we are able to reframe the meaning of our feelings. Our struggle is one of identities—God’s, ours, and our enemy’s. Know these and seize victory in Jesus.